



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



GUARD UNITS RETURN TO US FROM EUROPE DEPLOYMENT

About 110 soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Alpha Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion and 147th Forward Support Company arrived in the United States on Wednesday, July 8, after serving on a 10-month deployment to Europe.

The units arrived at Fort Bliss, Texas, where they will spend the next several weeks completing demobilization requirements before returning to South Dakota.

The units deployed in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which builds readiness, increases interoperability and enhances the bond between ally and partner militaries using multinational training events in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

The Aberdeen-based Alpha Battery is equipped with the Multiple Launch Rocket System, or MLRS, and provides artillery support to a brigade, division, corps or coalition task force. The Watertown-based Forward Support Company is a multifunctional logistics unit which provides supply and maintenance support.

Details of the unit's arrival to South Dakota and welcome home event will be announced at a later date once confirmed.



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SFVAHCS SURPASSES 1,413 VIDEO VISITS IN 2020

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that video telehealth appointments to veterans' homes [increased over 1000%](#), as veterans increasingly chose virtual care through VA Video Connect during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Sioux Falls, Aberdeen, Watertown, Sioux City, Wagner, and Spirit Lake, the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System has conducted over 1,413 telehealth appointments between Oct. 2, 2019 - June 30, 2020.

VA Video Connect allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection. As in-person interactions decreased in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the VA Video Connect supported veterans' abilities to continue care and remain safely at home. Usage of video to home services has been increasing since mid-March with peak usage reaching over 29,000 appointments per day.

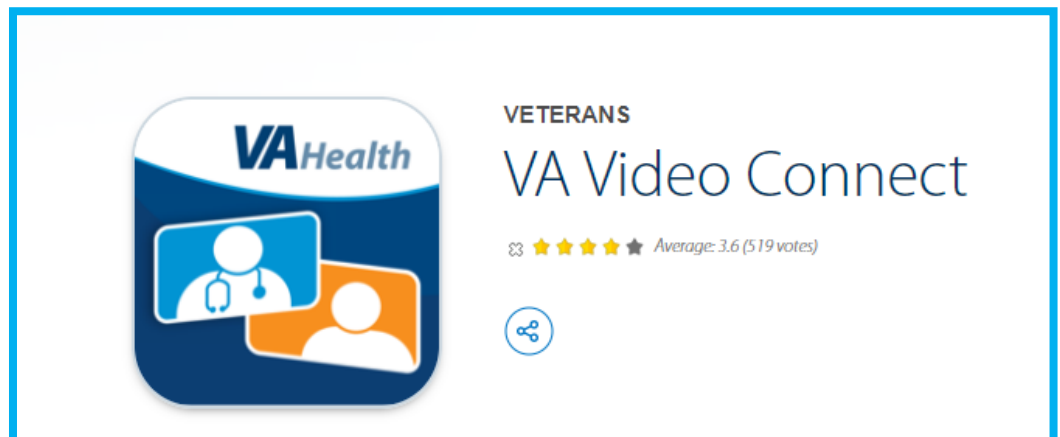
The increase at the Sioux Falls VA represents a 422% increase from Oct. 1, 2018 - June 1, 2019. Other telehealth milestones from the Sioux Falls VA include:

- Partnering with County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) to provide telehealth services at two county courthouses.
- Implementation of home telehealth (remote monitoring) for suspected or confirmed Covid-19 cases to reduce hospitalizations for observation.
- A virtual visitor program for all inpatient veterans to connect through video with their families.

The VA is also taking strides to bridge the digital divide for veterans who lack the technology or broadband internet connectivity required to participate in VA telehealth services. At the national level, [VA is working with strategic partners](#), through the [VA Secretary's Center of Strategic Partnerships](#),

to increase access to the technology that Veterans need to connect with their VA health care team virtually.

"As we near the three-year anniversary of the launch of VA Video Connect, even during these challenging times, the VA has and continues to maintain access to high-quality health care for veterans," said Sioux Falls VA Medical Center Director Lisa Simoneau. "As the service becomes more popular, the VA remains committed to providing a seamless user experience to ensure veterans have access to care where and when they need it."



NATIONAL ACADEMIES AFFIRMS SCIENTIFIC NECESSITY OF VA CANINE RESEARCH

A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) [study](#) has affirmed the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) position that canine research is “scientifically necessary” for certain areas of research that benefit seriously disabled veterans.

An independent committee assembled by NASEM to examine the issue determined that use of canines is necessary for VA research into spinal cord injury and heart disease and will need to continue for the foreseeable future. It also found that current VA animal research programs are meeting and exceeding all federal regulations and guidelines.

The study was commissioned by the VA to provide an independent, rigorous and unbiased look at how the ethics of research with animals, together with scientific principles, must inform the process of determining what research to conduct. The study will help ensure that the debate surrounding this issue is grounded in careful analysis, scientific consensus and facts.

“This study confirms what we’ve said all along: at this point canine research is the only viable option for developing and testing certain treatments to improve the quality of life of some seriously disabled veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

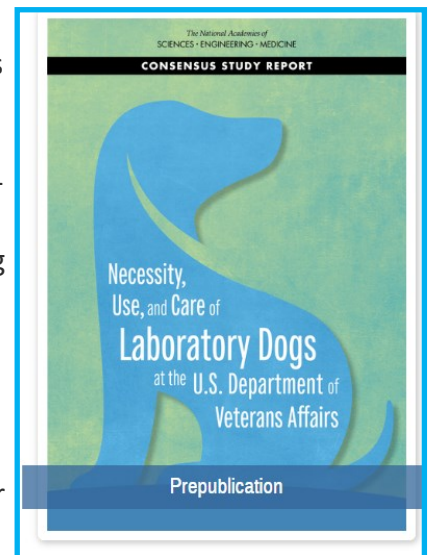
VA canine research has led to the development of the cardiac pacemaker (1950s), liver transplantation (1960s), the use of ablation to treat cardiac arrhythmias (late 1990s-early 2000s) and improved techniques for hip replacement surgery (1990s).

Most recently, canine research in Cleveland involving VA researchers led to the development of a device that allows paralyzed patients to breathe without a ventilator, cough independently and communicate with a stronger voice. This device gave veterans increased independence and significantly reduced respiratory infections and hospitalizations.

The VA has reduced its use of canines in research to the absolute minimum required at this time to fulfill its commitment to finding treatments for veterans with life-threatening health conditions.

But the VA has supported this type of research for decades and continues to do so because it is absolutely necessary to better treat life-threatening health conditions in our veterans.

To see how canine research benefits veterans, visit this [link](#).



STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE – DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

COVID19 TRAVEL PACK

To assist in the reduction of the spread of the coronavirus, Veteran transports will receive COVID TRAVEL PACK once admitted on board the vehicle.

The travel pack includes:

1. Hand Sanitizer – Keep hands clean and away from nose, eyes, and mouth
2. Face Mask – Protect others - Wear mask in close quarters or when distancing is not available
3. Bandana – If mask is too confining use bandana for similar effect.
4. Water – Keep hydrated
5. NRE – Long distances, other emergencies
6. Literature – Learn the positive ways of controlling the virus.
7. String Backpack

SPECIAL THANKS TO NAPA, MOBRIDGE, 5D-HAND SANITIZER, GOVOT OF SOUTH KOREA-FACE MASKS, CDC- GUIDELINES, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION-BACK PACK AND BANDANA.

HELP HEAL VETERANS DONATES CRAFT KITS TO VA HOSPITALS TO HELP PROVIDE ACTIVITIES FOR VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced [Help Heal Veterans](#) has provided nearly 50,000 craft kits, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, to more than 90 VA facilities for veterans who are isolated.

The department's [VA Voluntary Service](#) and [Recreation Therapy Service](#) are working with VA providers to identify veteran inpatients and outpatients to receive the [craft kits](#) which will be accompanied

by other leisure activities and information about VA programs and services.

"Part of the VA's charge is to support the positive mental health of veterans and these crafts and leisure activities will benefit that effort," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Help Heal Veterans offerings will provide more than 70,000 hours of activity helping to keep our veterans productively engaged — giving them a positive sense of accomplishment upon completion."

VA recreation therapists nationwide share that veterans living with disabilities, pain, anxiety, addiction or depression, especially during the pandemic, enjoy the craft kits and experience multiple benefits including — keeping their hands busy while helping to maintain dexterity. Many veterans gift the finished crafts to friends, family and other veterans. [VA Peer Support Specialists](#) have also distributed the craft kits to veterans in the community.

Help Heal Veterans has had a long-standing partnership with the VA and typically provide kits in categories such as masks, leatherwork, woodwork, jewelry, paint-by-numbers, needlecrafts, poster art, scrapbooks, model cars, airplanes, boats, and more. In a recent Help Heal Veterans survey of veterans who have used the kits, 94% polled reported the kits gave them a more positive outlook on life and 98% reported the kits divert their attention to healthy coping practices.

The therapeutic and rehabilitative benefits of crafting for VA patients is especially significant for veterans living with [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) and [Traumatic Brain Injuries](#).

To learn more about recreation therapy or volunteer with VA, visit [Recreation Therapy](#) or [Voluntary Service](#).



Help Heal Veterans
Therapeutic Craft Kits

VA LAUNCHES COVID-19 SCREENING TOOL

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launching of a digital [COVID-19 screening tool](#) to streamline veteran access to medical care during the coronavirus pandemic.

The tool, designed with veteran and staff input, enables the screening of more than 10,000 people each day.

Veterans, their caregivers, and VA health care employees can use this tool on their mobile phones before entering facilities. It takes less than a minute to complete and helps reduce wait times, lowers exposure risk and eases patient stress. It also helps veterans gain confidence with increased digital interactions as part of their VA health care experience.

“This screening tool emphasizes the ongoing importance of the VA’s investment in digital modernization, as it went from initial concept to national availability in less than two weeks,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “In addition to providing a broad range of innovations and improvements that significantly benefit the veterans we serve; our culture of innovation allows us to respond quickly to urgent and evolving needs.”

To protect patients and staff, the VA screens everyone for coronavirus symptoms and exposure each time they enter a health facility. VA staff uses the information received to direct people to either enter the building or go to a designated area for additional screening.

Veterans, caregivers, and staff can use the tool by texting the word “SCREEN” to 53079 or scan a dedicated QR code with their mobile phone to get a link to the tool. They then answer a series of simple questions and share their results at the VA facility entrance.

For more about VA efforts to meet veteran and staff needs during the coronavirus pandemic, visit [VA.gov coronavirus FAQs](#) and [VA’s public health response](#).

COVID-19 screening tool

Please answer the questions listed below. Share your results with the staff member at the facility entrance.

We won't store or share your data.

Are you a VA employee or contractor?

Yes No

In the past 24 hours, have you had a fever?

Yes No

In the past 7 days, have you had a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing that's new or getting worse?

Yes No

In the past 3 days, have you had any of these symptoms?

- Fever or feeling feverish (chills, sweating)
- Fatigue (feeling tired all the time)
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of smell or taste
- Sore throat
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea


Yes No

Do you currently have a runny nose or nasal congestion?

Yes No

In the past 14 days, have you had close contact with someone who you know was diagnosed with COVID-19?

Yes No



OK to proceed

Valid for

Tuesday

July 7, 10:11 a.m.

Please show this screen to the staff member at the facility entrance.

Thank you for helping us protect you and others during this time.

VA ROLLS OUT SIMPLIFIED TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT SYSTEM FOR VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is rolling out a new system in July for veterans and eligible beneficiaries to submit and track transportation reimbursement claims using the VA's secure web-based portal, [Access VA](#).

The Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS), which is accessible 24/7, 365 days a year, will simplify how [eligible veterans and beneficiaries](#) claim mileage reimbursement for travel to and from both VA health care or VA authorized non-VA health care service locations.



"The VA is working diligently to find new ways to innovate and simplify how we serve veterans and their beneficiaries," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Streamlining the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System will help our veterans get their travel reimbursements more securely and efficiently."

BTSSS enables veterans and caregivers to submit claims for reimbursement of costs from a personally owned vehicle, common carrier, meals and/or lodging, and other travel related expenses such as tolls, parking and luggage.

The national implementation across [Veterans Integrated Service Networks \(VISN\)](#) will run in phases through November. The first phase will start in July and includes VA Salt Lake City Health Care System, Kansas City VA Medical Center, Bay Pines VA Health Care System, Bay Pines, FL and Minneapolis VA Health Care System. The implementation will continue in phases beginning on the following dates:

- September 8: VISN's 1, 9, 12, 17, 21, 22
- October 5: VISN's 2, 6, 10, 15, 20
- November 2: VISN's 4, 5, 7, 8, 16, 19, 23

As BTSSS goes live, the use of kiosks will be discontinued however, in person claims and hard-copy submissions are still available. For more information on BTSSS and eligibility, visit the [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement](#) webpage.

Securing your Access to VA

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[I am a Family Member](#)

[I am a Service Member](#)

[I am a VA Business Partner](#)

[I am a VA Employee or Authorized Contractor](#)

VA RECEIVES FUNDING FROM THE US POSTAL SERVICE FOR PTSD RESEARCH

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced, during national Post-traumatic Stress Awareness (PTSD) month, [VA's National Center for PTSD](#) will fund more research about PTSD. This is thanks to the proceeds from the [Healing PTSD semipostal stamp](#), which was issued in December 2019 by the U.S. Postal Service.

More than seven million stamps were sold from December 2019 to May, garnering upwards of \$717,000 which have been disbursed to the VA.

"Thanks to the millions of Americans who purchased the Healing PTSD stamp, the VA will continue to study, create awareness, educate, and develop policies which better the lives of veterans with

PTSD," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The stamp not only raises awareness about PTSD but will provide funding for needed research and education about trauma and PTSD treatment."

Anyone who has seen or gone through a traumatic event, such as war, sexual assault, or a serious accident, can develop PTSD. As a result, they may experience problems sleeping, trouble concentrating, recurrent dreams about the trauma, intense reactions to reminders of the trauma, disturbances in relationships and/or isolation. However, PTSD can be treated.

The VA offers personalized effective treatments for PTSD including [talk therapy](#) and [medication](#). During PTSD Awareness Month and all year round, the VA encourages veterans to find out more about PTSD and treatment.

This initiative is aligned to the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide](#) (PREVENTS), a nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, and connect veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources.

For more information about PTSD, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

U.S. Postal Service Dedicates Healing PTSD Semipostal Fundraising Stamp

On Sale Today Nationwide



VA SUPPORTS 988 EXPANSION FOR NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION CRISIS LINE AND CRISIS LINE ACCESS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced their support for the Suicide Prevention [988 expansion initiative](#), a new national three-digit emergency telephone number to access crisis call centers across the country for suicide prevention and mental health services, including the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), by July 2022.

The VA is working alongside the [Federal Communications Commission](#), the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), and the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) to implement and activate the 988 expansion.

“The 988 three-digit number will help veterans and non-veteran callers quickly access help in times of crisis and open the door to engage new individuals in life-saving care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The Veterans Crisis Line will continue to remain available 24/7, 365 days a year, by calling 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1.”

Once activated, the 988 expansion will also grant the VA the opportunity to collaborate with the suicide prevention community across the United States.

This initiative is aligned with the [President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide \(PREVENTS\)](#) program, a nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, and connect veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#).



WHITE HOUSE/VA LAUNCH REACH

The White House and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the REACH national public health campaign aimed at empowering all Americans to play a critical role in preventing suicide.

The goal of REACH, which was established by the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide \(PREVENTS\)](#), is to change the conversation around suicide by urging people to recognize their own risk and protective factors — as well as the risk and protective factors of their loved ones.

"REACH will empower our nation's veterans to seek and receive help and it will encourage them to reach out to their brothers and sisters in need who may be vulnerable," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The power of this campaign will change how we talk about mental health and suicide in our nation. It will ensure that those in need, especially the men and women who have served our great nation, will receive the care and support they deserve."

"The REACH campaign will inspire and educate all Americans — encouraging them to share their own struggles and to reach out to those who are hurting. It will engage our veterans to help lead the way as we change how we think about, talk about, and address suicide," said PREVENTS Executive Director Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen. "I urge everyone to go to wearewithinreach.net and take the PREVENTS Pledge to REACH and be part of the solution. Together, we will prevent suicide."

The website also includes information on factors that may protect against suicide, such as belonging to a faith-based community, healthy family relationships, having a purpose in life and strong problem-solving skills. REACH encourages everyone to intentionally strengthen their protective factors — to care for their emotional health and well-being just as they do their physical well-being.

Although suicide is preventable, the nation is facing an epidemic in deaths, with 132 Americans dying by suicide each day. In 2017 there were 47,173 suicide deaths and an estimated 1.4 million suicide attempts. For veterans, the overall suicide rate is 1.5 times higher and the female veteran suicide rate is 2.2 times higher than the general population after adjusting for age and/or gender.

To that end, the REACH campaign website, [wearewithinreach](http://wearewithinreach.net), provides information to help people recognize risk factors for suicide, including financial stress, chronic illness or pain, isolation and mental illness, in themselves and in their loved ones. It also links to resources that can provide assistance in avoiding the hopelessness that can lead to suicide.

Campaign messages and imagery using the hashtag #REACHNow will be evident on a wide range of digital platforms immediately after the launch. The website will include a video public service announcement supported by a partnership with the PenFed Foundation and SoldierStrong and created by Tree Media. Media covering this issue can download [VA's Safe Messaging Best Practices](#) fact sheet for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in crisis, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for confidential support 24 hours a day at 800-273-8255. Veterans and service members, including National Guard and Reserve, who need immediate help should call the 1-800 number and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line, chat online at www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat or text 838255.

Social Security Administration Important Information

We are still available to help by phone.

A local representative is available to take your call Monday
thru Friday from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at:

HURON: 1-866-563-4604

(TTY) 1-800-325-0778

We may be able to schedule an appointment if we
cannot help you by phone.

Please do not come into one of our local offices.
We cannot accept walk-in visitors at this time.

You may also visit **SSA.gov**.
Many of our services can be completed online.

Visit **CDC.gov** for information about COVID-19.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
 Jul 22—SD Veterans Council—Military Alliance Building—1600 W. Russell Street—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
 Aug 5-11—HyVee Stores “Operation Helpful Smile” DAV Fundraiser—Sioux Falls
 Aug 6—Nation A&W Root Beer Float Day
 Aug 24—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
 Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre
 Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair
 Sep 3-7—SD State Fair
 Sep 5—DAV/727 Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings
 Sep 7—State Offices Closed
 Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Sep 18—POW/MIA Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—Sioux Falls—6:30 pm
 Sep 18—Veterans Stand Down—SD Military Heritage Alliance Building—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
 Dec 1—Governor’s State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 12—Governor’s State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

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